

THE UNDERGROUND PRESS IN AMERICA by Robert J. Glessing. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1970. 207 pp. \$6.50.

The underground press, with a circulation approaching 5 million, is the most significant cultural manifestation of America's youth counterculture that is still in the hands of that subculture (rock music is, apart from local groups, a commercial enterprise). In an effort to capture this constantly changing and inchoate phenomenon, Robert J. Glessing has written a good, and generally sympathetic, introduction to the world of the 450-odd underground tabloids.

Beginning with an historical survey, Glessing traces the origins of the underground to the founding of the now overground *Village Voice* in 1955, and explains the proliferation of anti-establishment newspapers in the late 1960s. After discussing the introduction of inexpensive offset printing which laid the technological foundations for the innovative, and often bizarre, graphic format of the underground press, he considers the growth of a distinct youth culture, alienated from the mainstream of society, and the increase of radical political activity—two central sources of the situation that favored the growth of the new newspapers. Glessing goes on to discuss the Underground Press Syndicate and Liberation News Service, which provide a national coordination to the diversity of the underground.

Moving to an analysis of the undergrounds as they exist today, Glessing explores the economics of the papers and finds that generally they are not run for financial gain (only about one-fourth make a profit). The editorial content varies from politics, news, and muckraking, to sex, drugs, and mysticism. Complementing this range of content is a distinctly subjective and committed writing style (the direct antithesis of the "objective" style practiced by the establishment press), which reflects the nonprofessional nature of its writers and editors, who are deeply involved with the culture and politics of their communities. The book examines the campus and military undergrounds, and concludes with speculations on the future.

Although its ground-breaking collection of facts on the underground press deserves high praise, the book has some faults. Glessing's analysis is especially thin in his chapters on the causes of youthful unrest and radical politics, where he merely rephrases popular commonplaces. A major omission is the failure to thoroughly describe the staff organization of the undergrounds. One senses that for all the interviews with editors, Glessing never talked to the writers, production, circulation, and business staffs of the papers he concentrates on, or sat in on one of the characteristically interminable staff meetings (participatory democracy in action). The deliberately non-hierarchical organization of most underground papers accounts for their chaotic layout (often several individuals work on the same page, arranging it to their taste—style manuals are unheard of in the underground), and their diversity in editorial content. For example, the Indiana University underground paper responded to a campus incident in which

a cream pie was thrown at guest lecturer Clark Kerr with half a dozen different views, ranging from a celebration of the act by the pie-thrower to a harsh condemnation of the act as politically infantile. Editorials are commonly group efforts, and when consensus cannot be reached opposite viewpoints are presented. Although some papers are either heavily political or exclusively cultural in orientation, the majority of underground papers balance the two, reflecting the diversity in their readership. Additionally, many underground paper staffs live in a communal or collective unit and frequently see their group life style as equal in importance to their weekly or biweekly product. (Glessing's omissions in these areas can be filled in by reference to "The Underground Press: A Special Report," by John Burks in *Rolling Stone*, No. 43, Oct. 4, 1969).

Glessing passes lightly over the multitude of problems which beset the undergrounds: finding a printer who does not object to the politics and/or pornography (many papers must travel great distances to their printer), maintaining circulation (foul weather cuts into street sales, generally the major means of distribution), harassment from conservatives, police, civic officials, and the establishment press, advertising (in the past year many record companies have discontinued underground advertising), and the high turnover rate of staff.

The underground press is the first real alternative structure created by America's dissident young. Divided, as Glessing points out, by one tendency to be oriented to radical politics and by another tendency to the cultural revolution of rock music, drugs, and mysticism, its final form is still unclear, but it has already had a distinct impact on American society.

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FOLK-SAY. Vol 1: 1919-1930, Vol 2: 1931-1932. Edited by B. A. Botkin. New York, Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970. 474 and 298 pp.

SPACE. AN EXPERIMENT IN LITTLE MAGAZINE PUBLISHING IN THE DEPRESSION. Edited by B. A. Botkin. New York, Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970. 128 pp.

"In 1921 I came to the University of Oklahoma to teach English," B. A. Botkin writes in his Introduction to the *Folk-Say* series. Thus the man and the work are B. B. C. (before *Bonnie and Clyde*). Over half a century has passed since he began assembling this material. The man is still going strong. Now the early material is re-issued. Let anyone interested in folk and popular culture pause and take note.

"The picturesqueness of the local scene of Oklahoma struck me," Mr. Botkin goes on to relate, to readers who now observe the picturesqueness of a local scene on the moon. Localism has given way to regionalism, and that to